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ABSTRACT

Art exhibits on college campuses not only foster aesthetic appreciation and knowledge, but they also stimulate and encourage community involvement. In New Mexico, public and institutional policies permit the purchase of art to enhance public buildings, including institutions of higher education. At Eastern New Mexico University's Clovis Campus (ENMU-Clovis), a branch campus serving a community college mission, funds were set aside from the capital outlay appropriations for the purchase of art. A committee of local community citizens and faculty members was appointed to recommend purchases, commissions, collections, and displays of art works in buildings. In addition, the committee established criteria for the selection of art works, and provided incentives for gifts and loans that added to the college's collection. The visual arts program at ENMU-Clovis has had numerous tangible and intangible benefits, including: (1) donors to the arts program have received tax savings, while the institution has realized an appreciation in the value of certain collectibles; (2) the art faculty has been prompted to conduct student art shows each semester; and (3) art exhibits are at least contiguous to various areas of work and study and therefore more readily accessible to students, faculty, guests, and all other employees. In the years to come, leadership from within the college and community, supported by national, state, and regional humanities organizations, will have important goals to attain and decisions to render so that the users of its facilities will continue to have the opportunity to view, touch, and experience quality works of art through its visual arts program. (EJV)

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VISUAL ARTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

Enhancing the Learning Environment

by

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A Paper Presented to the

COMMUNITY COLLEGE HUMANITIES ASSOCIATION

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Exhibits of art found on college campuses foster appreciation and transmit knowledge, they also stimulate and encourage community involvement. The opportunity to experience and appreciate works of art is essential to the very fiber of a democratic society. Colleges therefore must be the catalysts in providing access to the varied realms of imagination, creativity, and sensitivity through planned visual arts programs.

The notion that the physical environment or facilities of a community college has an impact on student attitudes, emotions, and learning has not been thoroughly researched, however, as Chernow (1983:23) asserted, "What evidence there is indicates the existence of a direct relationship." The fact that over half of student population attending American colleges and universities are enrolled in community colleges prompted Chernow to further assert...

> ....those of us who recognize the importance of community college education, in examining our values, face several inescapable conclusions. If, for example, we acknowledge the educational value of university art collections and see art as an indispensable element in a democracy, we must examine our lack of activity in bringing works of art into community college settings. What is holding us back? Is it a lack of donors or money, or a lack of recognition that this is an unattended educational responsibility?

Public and institutional policies must be encouraged to allow the purchase of art work for public access. Some states now permit one percent of capital construction projects to be used for the purchase of art to enhance public buildings including institutions of higher education. Such is the case in New Mexico and the allocations that have been received for this

purpose certainly hold to the concept that "art is tradition" in New Mexico. The growing trend in recognizing the cities of Santa Fe and Taos as high ranking American centers for art even prompts further encouragement for the use of state funds for purchasing art to be shown in New Mexico public places.

The planning and development of a new campus in the late 1970's prompted the administration at Eastern New Mexico University's Clovis campus (a branch serving a community college mission) to set aside funds from the capital outlay appropriations for the purchase of art. It was an administrative decision that there was a responsibility on the part of the campus to provide the public with opportunities to examine, analyze, and develop an appreciation for quality works of art in a non-threatening, accessible setting.

Among those strategies determined necessary to attain practically any goal in a community college setting is the involvement and consultation with the local community groups and influential persons. A strategy employed in determining the campus visual arts exhibits at ENMU-Clovis was to appoint local community citizens and faculty members to serve as a committee to recommend purchases, commissions, collections, and displays of art works in the buildings. This group quickly developed its philosophy which parallels that at Connecticut's Housatonic Community College (Chernow, 1983:23):

> ...students can react to outstanding examples of art honestly, even profoundly. Unlike the typical secondhand experience people are generally afforded, the facility offers firsthand experiences with "live" art that can be loved or hated or ignored, and reexamined another day.

The art committee made an early determination that the purchases of works would require that two main criterion be met: 1) That works be representative of the three basic cultures of New Mexico (Hispanic, Native American, or early Pioneer/Cowboy); or art produced by noted artists who have resided or do reside in New Mexico. Other factors weighed by the committee include the historical and educational benefits that may be derived from the purchase, not only for the casual observers, but also for specific classes. Another factor in their decisions is how well the works contribute to the aesthetic appeal and general improvement in the appearance of the buildings. The cultural themes motivate an appreciation for regional art, they are of educational value to the local region, and there is a provision for a non-structured, unintimidating environment for housing and displaying the art. The committee's calculations certainly were and are in keeping with the traditions of those six individuals (Sharp, Couse, Phillips, Blumenscheim, Dunton, and Berninghaus) who founded the Taos Art Society in 1912. According to their charter, the purpose of the group was "to develop a high standard of art among its members, and to aid in the diffusion of taste for art in general and to facilitate bringing before the public through exhibitions and other means, tangible results of the works of its members" (Nelson, 1980:8).

The efforts of such a committee are manifold in providing the incentive for gifts and loans that add to a collection. The contacts which they make and their motivation to make a contribution to the community through their artistic notions

can pay great dividends. Funds for discretionary use in the committee's selection of art stimulates good planning and a basis for their careful research for valued works of art in the region. Reimbursement for travel to the individual committee members, hosting guest artists at college expense, and other kinds of financial incentives reflect care and the state of seriousness in the tasks of the committee.

Aside from the aesthetic and educational benefits which are certainly derived from a program of planning and utilization of visual arts in community college facilities, there exist at least two economic benefits. First, for the donors of valued art works (some of which are a result of purchases) there can be individual benefits in tax savings. Community colleges, as non-profit organizations, can benefit by receiving art donations. If the work is to be used for any type of educationally stated purposes, the donor may deduct the entire fair market value of the work (David, 1981:101). Second, institutions, by the same token, may realize an appreciation in value of certain collectibles. A good example of this occurrence is the marked appreciation in value of of the late New Mexico artist, Peter Hurd. An indication of climbing values is revealed in the chart on the next page.

Leadership and guidance in visual arts programs at community colleges has to be provided. Organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts, state and regional humanities organizations, and private corporations can only provide a limited function---it will take individual leadership among the chief administative officers, the deans, department chairs, and

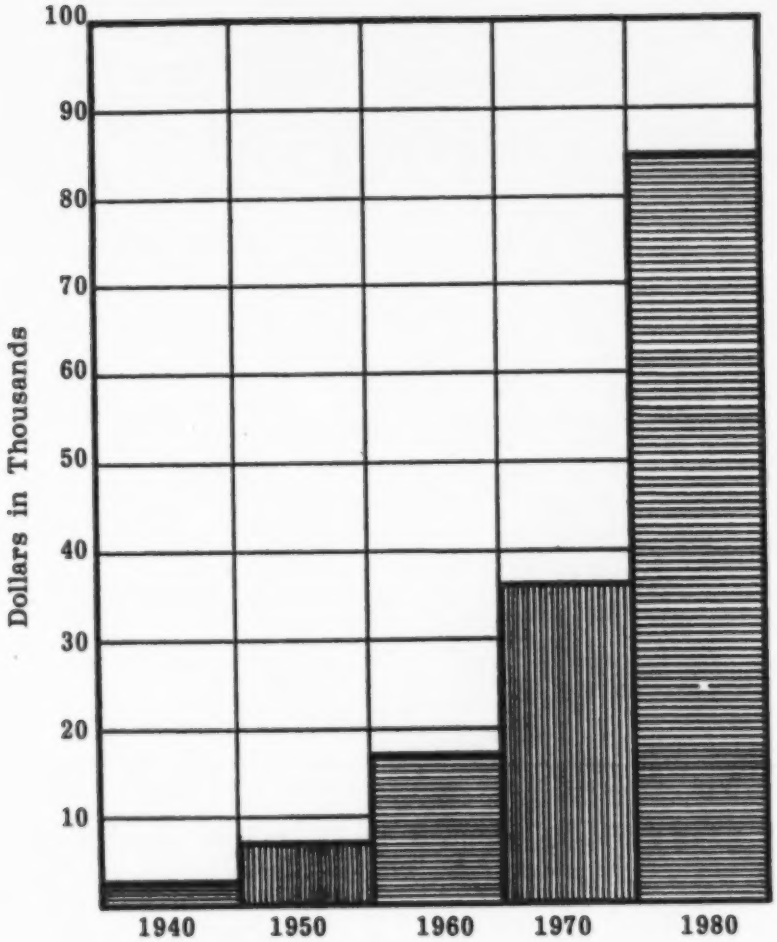

CHART 1

Price History of the Major
Art Works of Peter Hurd, N.A.*

*Source: The Wiggins Galleries
Roswell, New Mexico

individual faculty members to promote and maintain viable visual arts programs in community colleges.

Much has been accomplished toward humanizing our public buildings with works of art since the establishment of the broad national policies were conceived by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1965. The thesis that lifelong learning is essential and continues to be subscribed to by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, lends itself to a National Endowment for the Arts panel conclusion that "...the arts have become one of the essential elements of a good society, an essential of a full life for the many, not a luxury for the few" (Thalacker, 1980:vii).

Community colleges are staging and should continue to stage policies for lifelong learning which include programs in the arts, humanities, literature, and other important disciplines outside the technical arena. According to Gleazer (1980:67), because of their characteristics, community colleges are in an advantageous position to further build on what are appropriate structures and to be the vanguard of necessary change in policies, institutional forms, and citizen attitudes. He further asserted that "...crucial to that process is the capability of community college leadership to see that what have been perceived often as institutional encumbrances in truth can be bridges into a new era of education and community service."

Roueche and Mink (1980:78) concluded that "...since community colleges are an integral part of the community, they are the focal point of culture. This is particularly true in

rural areas [like Clovis] where culture is often not available elsewhere." Hence, community colleges must grasp the aesthetic opportunities when they are presented and rise to meet the challenge that campuses are something other than stale and pragmatic institutions concerned soley with vocational-technical education and hosting an academic curricula that simply meets the "transfer imperatives." If holistic improvements are to be made in community colleges' curricular offerings, opportunities for change when presented should be seized and exploited. Actions must be consistent with our rhetoric by way of planned programs in the visual arts, then there will begin the high degree of exposure to the accumulation of the masses.

> The community college can become a primary agent of aesthetic or sensory education because it is more flexible than other institutions, more adaptable to change. And community colleges are strategic. That is, they are able to plan programs that use one kind of experience to foster another.
>
> The evidence is in. The inferences have been drawn. The arts are not only invaluable tools in the learning process, but the stimulation they provide for innovation, healthy brain development, and creative thinking may be a key to more fully conscious living. The genuine breadth of a sensory education [or a visual arts program] can be realized <u>now</u> if we will only begin (Roueche and Mink, 1980:79).

The planned utilization of a visual arts program in community college facilities may well benefit students and the faculty more than any other groups. For example, art exhibited at ENMU-Clovis has prompted the art faculty to conduct student art shows each semester. Activities associated with the art exhibits contribute toward the students' awareness, self assurance, and motivation in their art classes. According to Muehsam (1978:27), students of art often find it desirable to

consult primary sources including the review of several distinct types of literary resources: 1) Writings left by artists themselves; 2) archival material relating to art and artists; and 3) accounts by contemporaries, such as reports, letters, travelogues, and critiques. Hence, learning opportunities are not limited to art students, rather these sources foster and promote interdisciplinary learning.

A college campus has the ability to expand visual experiences by hosting visual arts displays. Not only can the community enjoy the benefits of an exhibit, gallery, or well placed collection of art there are certain types of institutional benefits such as marketing, recruitment of students, and general public relations which can occur. According to Lowry (1967:17-23), the real enjoyment of a work of art is an indication of our ability to see; thus, the more our visual experience expands, the greater amount of pleasure we derive from the visual form the artist has created. Lowry further indicated that an artist's work demands on our part an awareness of the visual process by which it has been created. These stimuli have a very important part in the development of community college users regardless of their vocational, educational, cultural, or avocational interests.

The Clovis campus of Eastern New Mexico University through its visual arts program makes a concerted effort to make art exhibits accessible. Students, faculty, guests, and all other employees share in the collection. Various areas of study, including laboratories, work stations, and offices are at least

contiguous to displays of art work. The time should be over when the only visual displays seen in campuses are simple bulletin boards with blue paper messages from community college leaders. (In all likelihood, the only profound message that students and faculty will return home with at the end of the day or even contemplate is blue paper)!

The Association of American Colleges recent study on curriculum that was cited in the Chronicle of Higher Education in February of this year made an astute observation:

> Trained eyes and ears enlarge the environment, join forces with reason, intitution, and a sense of history in recognizing the ways in which the Sistine Chapel, a Wagnerian opera, a Japanese floral arrangement, a Rembrandt portrait, and breakdancing are expressions both of exuberant individual creativity and of the culture that nurtured them. Once more we are led to a sense of the complexities and interrelationships of human society, a sense of the values that inform artistic expression and performance.

Among those important goals to be attained and decisions to be rendered at ENMU-Clovis in the years to come will be the continuation of providing the users of its facilities with the opportunity to view, touch, and experience quality works of art through its visual arts program. The acquisition of new works including sculpture, photos, paintings, carvings, weavings, and pottery will continue to be a priority. As community college leaders and administrators, the collective group must continue to seek funding through its existing agencies, boards, and interested donors. Also, there must be continued planning in the variety of ways by which we provide the public with opportunities to share in the wealth of our culture through visual arts.

It was concluded by George Nichols in 1877 that, "Men are usually selfish because they see so little. Teach them to observe, to compare, and they will discover the good and the beautiful rather than the bad and ugly; for there is nothing evil in itself, but only that which the mind conceives in its ignorance" (Lowenfeld and Brittain, 1970:333).

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APPENDICES

Selected Art Works

ENMU-Clovis

Patricia Warren; "She Waits His Return"; Bronze; 18 X 28½

John Boomer; "Woman with Basket";
Bronze; 5 X 17

Joseph H. Sharp; "Running Horse";
Etching; 10½ X 13½

Peter Hurd; "A Far Away Place"; Serigraph; 30 X 20

Gary Niblett; "Wild Flowers"; Oil Painting; 30 X 20

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